

Satan's Final Deceptions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 12:9; Rev. 16:13, 14; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Ezek. 8:16; Ezek. 20:1–20; Rev. 18:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”
(*John 17:17, NKJV*).

It was one of those gorgeous September mornings in Chicago. As the sun rose over Lake Michigan and commuters battled traffic jams on the Kennedy and Eisenhower expressways, and children made their way to school, a chilling story began to emerge that struck fear into the hearts of Chicagoans. People were becoming tragically sick, and some were dying just a few hours after taking Tylenol capsules. On testing, each of the capsules proved to be laced with potassium cyanide, a deadly poison. A deranged individual had tampered with the medication. To this day, we don't know who did this.

As we have seen, Revelation warns us that the “inhabitants of the earth” will drink a deadly potion called the “wine of Babylon.” There are false doctrines and teachings that, in the end, will lead only to death. However, the world is not left without the antidote, the protection, against this spiritual poison: the three angels' messages.

In this week's lesson, we will continue looking, not only at Babylon's deceptions but also at Jesus' plan to save us from them and the death that they would otherwise bring.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 3.*

The Way That Seems Right in a Man's Eyes

In the context of the last days, Jesus uttered a powerful warning, “ ‘For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ ” (*Mark 13:22, NKJV*). Who are “the elect”? He later says, “ ‘And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other’ ” (*Matt. 24:31, NKJV*). A little scary, isn't it, when the deception in the last days will be so great that even the faithful ones will be in danger of being deceived?

Read Revelation 12:9. Who is deceived by Satan? How do we understand these words?

Obviously, God is going to have some faithful people in the last days, as He has had all through the ages. However, the wording here shows just how widespread Satan's deception really is.

Read Proverbs 14:12. What powerful warning is presented here?

People are often told to follow their own conscience in order to determine for themselves what is right or wrong, good or evil, and then live accordingly. But the Scripture says that we are all sinners, all corrupted (*Jer. 17:9, Rom. 3:9–18*), and so to trust our own sentiments is almost a guaranteed way to, sooner or later, get it wrong and even to do wrong. A lot of evil has been perpetrated through the ages by people utterly convinced of the rightness of their cause. That is, they followed the “way that seems right” to them.

Instead, we must immerse ourselves in the Word of God, and from His Word, as we surrender to the Holy Spirit, learn truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil. Left to our own devices, or even to our own senses, we can become easy prey to Satan's deceptions.

Think through examples of people who have acted based on what they themselves believed was right, or even what they believed was God's will but have done evil things. What can we learn from these tragic events?

The Old Lie of Immortality

Read Revelation 16:13, 14 and Revelation 18:2, 23. What allusions to spiritualism do you find in these verses?

Such expressions as the “dwelling place of demons” or the “spirits of demons” and “sorcery” all indicate demonic activity. No wonder we have been warned that of the two great deceptions in the last days, one will be “the immortality of the soul” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588).

Of course, that’s so easy to see today. Even in the Christian world, the idea of the soul being immortal is all but staple Christian doctrine. Many Christians believe that, at death, the saved go soaring off to heaven, and the lost descend into hell. How often, for instance, after the great evangelist Billy Graham died, did we hear that “Billy Graham is safe now in heaven, in the loving arms of Jesus,” or the like? This kind of thing is taught all the time from pulpits; in classrooms; and, especially, at funerals.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5; Job 19:25–27; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; and Revelation 14:13. What clear instruction did God give His people about life after death, and where do we find our hope?

One of the pillars of Babylonian deception is a false understanding of death, which, centered in the idea of the immortality of the soul, prepares the way for the deceptive influence of spiritualism. If you believe that the dead, in some form, live on and might even be able to communicate with us, then what protection do you have from any of the myriad deceptions that Satan has? If someone who you thought was your dead mother or child, or someone else beloved, was suddenly to appear and talk to you, how easy would it be to be fooled by your senses? This has happened in the past; happens now; and, certainly, as we near the very final days, will happen again. Our only protection is to stand firmly rooted in what the Bible teaches and to cling to the biblical teaching about death as a sleep until the second coming of Jesus.

What examples of modern spiritualism exist in your culture today? Why is firm adherence to the Word of God our only protection?

Babylon: The Center of Sun Worship

Sun worship was prominent in Egypt, Assyria, Persia, and certainly Babylon. In his book *The Worship of Nature*, James G. Frazer makes this observation, “In ancient Babylonia the sun was worshipped from immemorial antiquity.”—(London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), vol. 1, p. 529. It may seem surprising, but at times, Babylonian sun worship influenced the worship of God’s people in the Old Testament.

Read Ezekiel 8:16 and 2 Kings 23:5, 11. What did the prophets write about the influence of sun worship in Israel and Judah? (See also Rom. 1:25.)

The prophet Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, pictured some of God’s people with their backs toward the temple of God worshipping the sun toward the east. Rather than worshipping the Creator of the sun, they worshiped the sun instead.

In Revelation 17, John described a time when the principles of Babylon, including sun worship, would enter the Christian church during an age of compromise. The casual conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great joy in the Roman Empire. Constantine had a strong affinity for sun worship. Edward Gibbon, the renowned historian, writes, “The Sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine.”—*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (London: J.O. Robinson & Co, Ltd., 1830), p. 12. In A.D. 321, Constantine also passed the first “Sunday law.” This edict stated, “On the venerable day of the Sun let the Magistrates and the people residing in the cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.”—Edict of Constantine, A.D. 321. This was not a law enforcing Sunday observance for all of Constantine’s subjects, but it did strengthen the observance of Sunday in the minds of the Roman population.

It was in succeeding decades that emperors and popes continued through state decrees and church councils to establish Sunday as the singular day of worship, which it remains today, as well, for the majority of Christians. What a powerful example of the hard truth that just because the majority of people believe in something, or practice it, doesn’t make it right.

Look around at how prevalent Sunday worship is in Christian churches. What should this fact teach us about how pervasive Satan’s deceptions are? Again, as with the state of the dead, what is our only safeguard?

A Call to Faithfulness

The message of the second angel in Revelation 14 is “ ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen.’ ” In Revelation 17, the woman identified as spiritual Babylon, dressed in purple and scarlet, rides upon a scarlet-colored beast, passes around her wine cup, and gets the world drunk with error. Church and state unite. Falsehood prevails. Demons work their miracles to deceive. The world catapults into its final conflict.

At the same time, the people of God are maligned, ridiculed, oppressed, and persecuted, but in Christ and through the power of His Holy Spirit, they are steadfast in their commitment. All the powers of hell and the forces of evil cannot break their loyalty to Christ. They are secure in Him. He is their “refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (*Ps. 46:1*).

God is calling an end-time people back to faithfulness to His Word. Jesus prayed, “ ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth’ ” (*John 17:17, NKJV*). The truth of God’s Word, not human opinion or tradition, is the North Star to guide us in this critical hour of earth’s history.

Here is a remarkable statement by Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, the author of the *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*. In 1893, he addressed a group of hundreds of Baptist ministers and shocked them as he explained how Sunday came into the Christian church.

“What a pity that it [Sunday] comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, then adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!”—Before a New York ministers’ conference, November 13, 1893.

Read Ezekiel 20:1–20. What is the gist of Ezekiel’s message here, and how does the Sabbath fit in with this call to faithfulness?

Ezekiel 20 is an earnest appeal for Israel to forsake pagan practices and to worship the Creator instead of false gods, in this case the “idols of Egypt.” In the message of the three angels, God is making a similar appeal for us to “worship the Creator,” for “Babylon is fallen.” And, too, as we know, the Sabbath, and faithfulness to it, will play a big role in final events.

What lessons can we take away for ourselves from what has been written in Ezekiel 20:1–20? (*See also 1 Cor. 10:11.*)

Grace for Obedience

The woman in scarlet and purple, riding on the scarlet-colored beast, has passed around her wine cup, and the world is drunk with Babylon's false doctrines. Speaking of the "wine of Babylon," Ellen G. White makes this clear comment: "What is that wine? Her false doctrines. She has given to the world a false Sabbath instead of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and has repeated the falsehood that Satan first told to Eve in Eden,—the natural immortality of the soul."—"Let the Trumpet Give a Certain Sound," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 6, 1892. These erroneous teachings have deceived millions. As a result, God is giving His people, still entrenched in error, a final last-day appeal.

Read Revelation 18:4, 5. What is God's appeal to multitudes still in fallen religious organizations?

As we already have seen (but worth repeating), many of God's people are in religious organizations that have compromised biblical teachings. They do not understand the truths of Scripture. God's loving appeal is straightforward: " 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues' " (*Rev. 18:4, NKJV*).

Read 1 John 3:4 and compare it to Romans 14:23. How does the Bible define sin? How do these Bible passages harmonize?

Sin is the transgression or the breaking of God's law. The only way anybody can obey the law is through faith in the power of the living Christ. We are weak, frail, faltering, sinful human beings. By faith when we accept Christ, His grace atones for our past and empowers our present. He gives us "grace and apostleship for obedience" (*Rom. 1:5, NKJV*). Heaven's appeal to His people in churches that do not respect and obey the law of God is to step out by faith. His appeal to Adventists in Sabbath-keeping congregations is to forsake all self-centered, human attempts at obedience and live godly lives by faith in the grace of Christ, which delivers us from sin's condemnation and its domination. And just as Israel's faithfulness to the law (*Deut. 4:6*) would have been a powerful witness to the world, our faithfulness, too, can be a powerful witness and help guide people out of Babylon.

Further Thought: “‘Babylon the great’ in the book of Revelation designates in a special sense, the united apostate religions at the close of time. . . . ‘Babylon the great’ is the name by which Inspiration refers to the great threefold religious union of the papacy, apostate Protestantism, and spiritism. . . . The term ‘Babylon’ refers to the organizations themselves and to their leaders, not so much to the members as such. The latter are referred to as ‘many waters.’ (Rev. 17:1, 15).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 851, 852.

“Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

In the Old Testament, the spirits of the dead played a major part in Babylonian religion. The Babylonians had a strong belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. They believed at death, the soul entered the spirit world. The concept of the immortal soul is foreign to the teachings of Scripture. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* clearly identifies the origin of the false idea of the immortality of the soul. “The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is . . . nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture. . . . The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended.”—Kaufmann Kohler, “Immortality of the Soul,” (1906).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is an understanding of the truth about death so critically important? What does it protect us from? Why is it so comforting too?
- 2 Some of the devil’s deceptions are obvious, others more subtle. How can we avoid being deceived by either?
- 3 In class, talk about the question, touched on in Sunday’s study, about those who do evil believing that they are following the will of God, as revealed in the Bible. How do we explain this? What role should the law of God play in the explanation?

Bike and Bible: Part 2

By M. B., as told to KATHIE LICHTENWALTER

My wife and I had saved money for many, many months to buy a bicycle for Hussein, the security guard for the building where we live as missionaries in the Middle East. God answered our prayers and helped us to buy a bicycle. As we inspected the answer to our prayers, we wondered out loud to each other, “What if we give Hussein a Bible with the bicycle?”

We wrote a note in a card and wrapped a Bible that we had bought many months earlier. We prayed for the best moment to present him with the gifts. I carefully planned what to say. I knew that the bicycle would be meaningful. I hoped that the Bible would be a sensitive step toward sharing truth.

Hussein was overwhelmed with emotion when we arrived at his door with the bicycle. The bicycle looked impressive! But I never expected the expression on his face as he gently held the Bible and carefully turned its pages. He was in awe. He was delighted. But I don’t know who was happier—him or me. After two years of friendship, I was finally giving my friend and brother a Bible, the gift I had prayed about the most! My joy was indescribable.

A few days later, Hussein invited me to his home for tea. When I arrived, I found him reading Genesis. His eyes sparkled. He explained that he had never read the Creation story before. I knew we had much to talk about, and I prayed for the Holy Spirit to give me the right words. That evening, we spoke of heaven and death. I showed Hussein some beautiful verses in his new Bible. As we spoke, Hussein kept quietly leafing through the pages of the Bible. He seemed so engrossed with the Bible that I sensed God urging me to offer to study the Bible with him. I heard myself giving that wonderful invitation, “Would you like to study the Bible together?” To my astonishment, he accepted—and with great eagerness. That week, we began our Bible studies. That week, God continued His amazing work, and He is still working. Hussein and I are both growing closer to God and to each other.

My heart is filled with thanksgiving to God. I am filled with awe by the privilege of sharing God with Hussein. I am thankful to my wife for her kind and faith-filled support. I am thankful to relatives in my homeland who have prayed with us for Hussein. I am thankful for believing friends who have



prayed for us during this experience. I thank God for sending us the money to buy the bicycle and for giving us the courage to share His Word with someone who is thrilled to learn about God from a new perspective.

Thank you for your mission offerings that help spread the gospel in the Middle East and around the world.

Part I: Overview

Revelation 14:8 announces the fall of spiritual Babylon. As we saw last week, Babylon was an oppressor of God's people in the Old Testament. Thus, Babylon is a fitting symbol of the citadel of error, of the center of apostasy, and of the archenemy of truth. Last week, we also studied the contrast between the woman in white, Christ's true church, and the harlot, Babylon. We noted that the false system of religion termed as Babylon looks to human religious leaders for authority rather than to the Word of God. Babylon derives its power from the state rather than from Christ. In keeping with the custom of many false religions, Babylon uses idols as representations of the deity.

This week, we will study the two major falsehoods of Babylon: the concept of the immortal soul and sun worship. Throughout the centuries, heathen religions have believed that the soul was immortal. This belief is true of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. This idea of the immortality of the soul entered the Christian church in the early centuries, along with the worship of pagan idols that were repackaged under a veneer of Christianity and venerated as saints. The second error, sun worship, also entered the Christian church relatively early when Christian leaders attempted to appease the pagans and make Christianity more palatable to them. The purported sacredness of Sunday and the immortality of the spirit are two of Satan's greatest deceptions for the last days. This week, we will study these deceptions in the light of God's Word.

Part II: Commentary

When the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, the ancient city of Babylon had long since been destroyed. John wrote Revelation toward the end of the first century A.D. Babylon had been overthrown by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C., more than 600 years before. The prophet Isaiah foretold Babylon's fate: "It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there" (*Isa. 13:20, NKJV*). Throughout the centuries, this prophecy has been proven true. Alexander the Great of Greece brought 10,000 men to Babylon to clear the ruins and rebuild the city. He died in Babylon before the project could be accomplished. Subsequent to his death, the mission was abandoned. The city has lain in ruins for more than 2,500 years.

Revelation's mystical Babylon then is certainly not the ancient city of Babylon. *The SDA Bible Commentary* forcibly reveals the identity of

spiritual Babylon: “Babylon, both literal and mystical, has thus long been recognized as the traditional enemy of God’s truth and people. As used in the Revelation the name is symbolic of all apostate religious organizations and their leadership, from antiquity down to the close of time. . . .

“This prophecy of the fall of Babylon finds its last-day fulfillment in the departure of Protestantism at large from the purity and simplicity of the gospel.”—Volume 7, p. 830.

This assertion leads us to a couple of significant questions. What were the major characteristics of Old Testament Babylon? Were some of its practices adopted by the Catholic Church in the early centuries after Christ’s ascension? We already have noted in last week’s study that idols were brought into the church and incorporated into Christian worship. This week, as we stated in our overview, we will focus on two other errors that corrupted the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages: the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness. Ellen G. White makes this remarkable statement, linking these twin errors together: “Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

Spiritualism

Throughout the book of Revelation, spiritualism is one of Satan’s final deceptions to unite the world and lead it to earth’s final conflict between the people of God and the forces of evil. Revelation 16:14 states, “For they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (*NKJV*). Revelation 19:20 adds that those who received the mark of the beast were deceived by these false spectacular wonders or signs, and Revelation 13 confirms that the devil “deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast” (*Rev. 13:14, NKJV*). According to Revelation 18:2, Babylon “has become the dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit” (*NKJV*). Under the guise of spiritualism, Satan will work with “lying wonders” and “all deceivableness” (*2 Thess. 2:9, 10*). One of his final deceptions will be the impersonation of the dead by his evil angels and a distortion of Bible truth, including the Sabbath.

Ellen G. White gives us this chilling picture of what is coming upon those who have accepted the error of the immortality of the soul: “The doctrine of man’s consciousness in death, especially the belief that spirits

of the dead return to minister to the living, has prepared the way for modern spiritualism. If the dead are admitted to the presence of God and holy angels, and privileged with knowledge far exceeding what they before possessed, why should they not return to the earth to enlighten and instruct the living? . . . He [Satan] has power to bring before men the appearance of their departed friends. The counterfeit is perfect; the familiar look, the words, the tone, are reproduced with marvelous distinctness. Many are comforted with the assurance that their loved ones are enjoying the bliss of heaven, and without suspicion of danger, they give ear ‘to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.’”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 551, 552.

Lest we pride ourselves on our knowledge of Bible truth and believe we are in no immediate danger from such blatant deceptions, think again. Modern spiritualism extends far beyond the impersonation of our loved ones by evil angels. (Bible-believing Adventists are, for the most part, not going to be tricked by Beelzebub appearing at the foot of their bed at night as dear old Uncle Barney back from the grave with “new light” on the Sabbath.) Spiritualism, in its modern incarnation, finds its expression in a more subtle, though devastating, attack on Bible truth.

One of its tenets, reaching all the way back to the Garden of Eden itself, is the serpent’s fatal lie that humans shall be as gods when they transgress God’s law. We see this pernicious tenet repackaged by postmodernism and marketed with seductive appeal in the teaching “Do as you will,” a refutation of, and attack on, the law of God itself. This dangerous sophistry subordinates the changeless and absolute sovereignty of God’s law to the caprice of human authority and the whims of culture. Subject to human authority, the law of God is thus made to have no force, nor be binding upon humanity. The devastating result is that God’s authority and Word are undermined and disregarded, to a large extent, in our modern cultures.

The bottom line? Satan doesn’t really care how he deceives us with the lying wonders of spiritualism. Whether by a blatant attack through “new light” from “dead” relatives or through a more subtle assault on the inspiration and the authority of God’s Word, it’s all the same to him. So, we must put on the whole armor of God (*Eph. 6:10–18*), praying for discernment to detect the most subtle deceptions of our unsleeping foe.

Attack on the Sabbath Truth

And that point neatly leads us to the second great error that Satan will use to deceive the people of God in the last days. It is the false teaching that the Sabbath is no longer valid because God’s law is no longer binding. This last error has its roots in antiquity. Sun worship has long been practiced by ancient cultures. The chief god of the Babylonians was Bel-Marduk. He was depicted as sitting on a golden throne in a golden temple before a

golden table. He was the sun god of justice, light, truth, and kingly authority. *Encyclopedia Britannica* has an insightful article describing the influence of the sun god on past civilizations. According to the editors of *Britannica*, the ancients believed, “The sun is the bestower of light and life to the totality of the cosmos; with his unblinking, all-seeing eye, he is the stern guarantor of justice; with the almost universal connection of light with enlightenment or illumination, the sun is the source of wisdom. . . . These qualities—sovereignty, power of beneficence, justice, and wisdom—are central to any elite religious group, and it is within these contexts that a highly developed solar ideology is found. Kings ruled by the power of the sun and claimed descent from the sun. Solar deities, gods personifying the sun, are sovereign and all-seeing. The sun is often a prime attribute of or is identified with the Supreme Deity.”—“Sun Worship: Religion,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

The Babylonians, along with their pagan counterparts, gave great reverence to the sun god, Bel-Marduk. The false religious system of end-time Babylon disregards the law of God as did its ancient counterpart. In the early centuries, a compromise occurred in the Roman Church to accommodate the surrounding pagan culture. To disassociate from the Jews and to evangelize the heathen, church and state leaders united to honor Sunday, first as a civil rest day and then as the official day of worship. Through the centuries of the Middle Ages under the auspices of Babylon, this church-state, geopolitical alliance substituted human traditions for the Word of God. The worship of idols replaced worshiping Jesus directly. The Bible truth about the state of the dead was supplanted by the error of the immortality of the soul. The Sabbath was changed from the seventh day, Saturday, to the first day, Sunday. It appeared that error and falsehood would triumph. But the Bible’s last book, Revelation, prophesied that God would raise up a last-day remnant who, saved by grace and through the power of the living Christ, would live in godly obedience and proclaim His last-day message to the world.

Part III: Life Application

Reflect: This week’s study ought to lead us to do some serious thinking about our own spiritual experience. If the devil is going to use spiritualism to deceive millions because they long for signs and wonders more than the truth of God’s Word, is it possible that we, too, could be deceived if the basis of our spiritual experience is feeling and emotion? Do we want signs and wonders more than the truth of God’s Word? Here are some questions for your class members to ponder this week in the classroom and beyond:

- 1. What role does emotion play in our religious experience? What if our emotions point one way and the Word of God points another?**

What then do we do? Are our feelings ever a safe guide? Explain. What if you were confronted with the appearance of a dead loved one? What would you do? More important, what is your only safeguard against the deceptions of spiritualism in your culture that undermine the supremacy of God's Word?

- 2. The change of the Sabbath is reflective of a departure from the Word of God. This change took place gradually over the centuries. Satan's deceptions are often subtle. He is a cunning strategist. Is it possible that we could be on the slippery slope of compromise in our own lives? If so, what might these compromises be? Further, what do you see as the greatest challenges the church is facing today in the area of compromise?**

- 3. Discuss the following statement: "Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme. The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 911. What element, or elements, stand out to you in this statement? Why?**
